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Polygraph Tests Urged for Top Security Posts

Los Angeles Times

A government-wide security committee has recommended to CIA Director William J. Casey that thousands of federal officials with special clearances for classified material take lie-detector tests.

The proposal is drawing sharp objections from career government officials on philosophical and practical grounds, sources said.

Under the proposal, those holding the special or "compartmented" security clearances—as distinguished from the usual levels of classified, secret and top secret—for work in a particularly sensitive area would have to submit to a polygraph examination to retain the clearance.

Some of the special clearances, often designated by a single letter or two, are so sensitive that they cannot be referred to by a person holding one or more of them unless he is certain the person he is communicating with holds the same clearance.

Richard K. Willard, counsel for intelligence policy at the Justice Department, acknowledged that the polygraph proposal is under consideration, but said it was at a very preliminary stage.

He said the proposal was advanced earlier this year, "but not as a result of a political decision by this administration."

Other sources, who declined to be identified, said the proposal emanated from the security committee, which includes officials responsible for security at various government agencies, ranging from the Justice Department to the National Security Agency and the CIA. The committee reports to Casey.

Adoption of the proposal would mark a sharp expansion of reliance on the polygraph as a clearance device for those engaged in security work. The CIA regularly uses the polygraph for all of its employees, while the FBI does not.

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